

a lot of people in America who were personally hurt by the Castro regime and whose families were hurt and who lost their property, and they even lost their lives, lost their loved ones. So it's, in that sense, more personal. But I don't think there's any question that we would have made more progress with Cuba than we have if they hadn't shot those planes down and murdered those innocent people a few years ago.

**Mr. Rather.** The "Castro regime" meaning Fidel, himself?

**The President.** Yes. They shot those Brothers to the Rescue planes down in blatant violation of international law. We don't believe they were in Cuban territorial waters. But even if they were in Cuban territorial waters, it was illegal. Cuba is a signatory to the Chicago convention, which specifically says how you have to handle planes like that. It governs what we do when we see planes take off from South America, small planes that we know are unarmed that may have drugs on them. A lot of times we have to follow them until they go down somewhere, or do that. What they did, it was a deliberate illegal killing.

**Mr. Rather.** That's a matter of foreign policy.

**The President.** Yes. And when they did that, the Congress reacted basically by passing the so-called Helms-Burton Act, which dramatically restricted the ability of any President to relax relations with Cuba. And it made me wonder if the person in the whole world that least wanted the embargo lifted was Fidel Castro. I mean, I've often wondered whether he and the people in America that don't want any change in relations are in some sort of unconscious dance with each other, because as long as that embargo is there, he's got an excuse for the failures of his regime.

### **China**

**Mr. Rather.** Mr. President, last question, China. There are reports out of China that they're razing church buildings, blowing them up, burning them down, on the eve of Christmas. And they've been doing this sort of thing for a year and a half. Are you now ready to recommend that the United States back this resolution at Geneva, before

the United Nations Human Rights Commission, to condemn this kind of thing?

**The President.** Well, let me say, I have been—I have worked, I believe, as hard as any President for religious liberty at home and around the world, even for people who disagree with me on a lot of things. And I have had innumerable conversations with Jiang Zemin and with other Chinese officials about this. I think that their view that people who have strong religious convictions represent a political threat is just wrong. So I will do what I think is appropriate at the time on this.

**Mr. Rather.** Does that include considering backing this resolution?

**The President.** I gave an answer. That's all the answer I want to give right now.

**Mr. Rather.** Mr. President, you have been very generous with your time, and I appreciate it.

**The President.** Thank you, Dan.

**Mr. Rather.** Thank you.

**The President.** Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 4:28 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Cuban youth Elian Gonzalez, rescued off the coast of Florida on November 25, 1999, who returned to Cuba on June 28, 2000; Senator Joseph Lieberman; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and President Jiang Zemin of China. The transcript was embargoed for release by the Office of the Press Secretary until 9 p.m. on December 19. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

## **Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President-Elect George W. Bush**

*December 19, 2000*

### **Advice for the President-Elect**

**Q.** What's your best advice—

**President Clinton.** Get a good team and do what he thinks is right.

### **National Economy**

**Q.** Mr. President-elect, you've spoken about the economy, about problems with the economy. Are you going to inherit a recession

from President Clinton? And President Clinton, what are your thoughts about that?

**President-elect Bush.** I really don't have any comments. I look forward to talking to the President. I'm so honored that he extended his hospitality to me and my wife yesterday. He didn't need to do this, and I'm most grateful that he would do so.

**Q.** [*Inaudible*]*—*what do you think about a recession?

**President Clinton.** Well, a recession is two quarters in a row of negative growth. I don't think we're going to have that. But we couldn't keep up 5 percent growth a year forever. I think 49 of the 50 blue chip forecasters think that growth will be 2.5 percent or better next year, and that will keep unemployment low. But I think there will be things to be managed. He'll have economic challenges, and you ought to give him a chance to meet them, if not try to figure it all out in advance.

#### **Advice for the President-Elect**

**Q.** Are you going to—

**Q.** What advice do you have for him, Mr. President?

**Q.** [*Inaudible*].

**President Clinton.** My only advice to anybody in this is just to get a good team and do what you think is right.

#### **North Korea**

**Q.** Are you going to North Korea?

**President Clinton.** No decision has been made on that. We've been talking, our people have, about what we've attempted to do in North Korea. It's interesting, when I had this meeting 8 years ago with the President-elect's father, he told me that the biggest problem that we were facing was the nuclear program in North Korea. And we were able to build on the work they had done and put an end to that.

And now the big problem there is the missile program. We may have a chance to put an end to it, and if we can, I think we should. But this is something that I want to consult with the President-elect and his team about, and we'll see what the facts are, and I'll try to do what's best for the country.

**Q.** Governor, I understand that you're not against him going, is that right?

**President-elect Bush.** I haven't had a chance to talk to the President yet, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

**President Clinton.** We've got to talk about this.

#### **Discussion With the President-Elect**

**Q.** What will you tell him is the biggest problem, Mr. President?

**President Clinton.** I want to talk to him, not you. [*Laughter*] He can talk about that. I waited 8 years to say that. [*Laughter*]

#### **The White House**

**Q.** Governor, how different is it to come to this house in your position now than what it was as a family member?

**President-elect Bush.** It's vastly different. It's such a huge honor to come as the President-elect. I don't think I'll really fully realize the impact until I swear-in. I suspect the President would say the same thing. I am humbled and honored, and I can't thank the President enough for his hospitality. He didn't need to do this.

**Q.** Yes, he did. [*Laughter*] It's protocol.

**President-elect Bush.** I hadn't quite finished yet. [*Laughter*]

**Q.** Go ahead and finish.

**President-elect Bush.** And I'm grateful. And I look forward to the discussion. I'm here to listen. And if the President is kind enough to offer some advice, if he is, I will take it in.

**Q.** Are there questions you have for the President, sir?

**President-elect Bush.** If there are, I'm going to ask it in private—and afterwards not share them with you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 11:27 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

#### **Statement on the Outcome of a NATO Foreign Ministers Meeting in Brussels**

*December 19, 2000*

I am very pleased with the outcome of NATO's foreign ministers meeting in Brussels last week. Secretary Albright and her